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ACCOMMODATED TEXTS.

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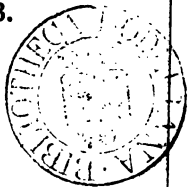


ACCOMMODATED TEXTS;

OR,

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS.

BY R. C. L. B.



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**WEETHEIM AND MACINTOSH,
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INTRODUCTION.

THE reader will probably wish me to explain what I mean by "Accommodated Texts." I mean, passages of Scripture quoted in a sense not intended by the inspired writer,—judging from an examination of the words themselves, together with the context, in which they stand. It is true that many of the soundest divines, in ancient and modern times, have sanctioned the practice of accommodating Scripture; and it is generally considered hypercritical, nay, almost heretical, to take exception to the application of a current text, in its conventional sense, on the ground that it is not the *true* sense of the passage.

I hope it will not be deemed presumptu-

ous in me who am *αγραμματος και ιδιωτης*, (Acts iv. 13,) to attempt to say a word against a system so highly sanctioned, but I would humbly suggest that we may be losing more precious instruction by putting our own sense upon the words of Scripture than if we took them in that intended by the Holy Ghost. In the following pages, when it is attempted to show that the popular sense of a passage is erroneous,—another, and I conceive a better sense is pointed out (not as a discovery of my own, but on the authority of the ablest commentators), so that the text is not lost but only adjusted to the use, apparently designed by its Divine Author.

Again, the practice of applying texts in a sense not borne out by the context, in order to inculcate *truth*, opens a wide door, both to false teachers to impose upon “the unstable and the unlearned” by using Scripture words, torn from their context, to prove doctrines and practices having “no

warranty of Scripture but rather repugnant to the Word of God ;” and also to worldly men to adduce such isolated passages to sanction their ungodly opinions and practices, or perhaps to adorn and give point to their sayings. In this way Scripture language is often turned against those very truths which the passages really convey.

Sometimes, however, it is replied, when a less familiar interpretation of a well-known text is proved to be the right one, “ May we not apply it in both senses ?” The one, perhaps, being contrary to the other ; indeed, some of the best commentators seem to have taken this view ; but I confess it appears to me to be trifling with the Word of God, and treating it as we should not treat the words of a friend, whose opinions we revered. Moreover, it is to be remarked that persons who admit the one meaning to be critically correct, and yet plead for the use of another *also*, never use such texts in their simple,



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watch over her. When, therefore, she had received this token of the Lord's undeserved kindness, in a spirit of thankful admiration of his dealings with her she calls the place "Beer-lahai-roi," "The well of Him that liveth and seeth me pray." "Have I also here, *i.e.*, in this desolate wilderness, looked after Him that seeth me, *i.e.*, seen the face of my gracious God! That God should appear to me in my master's house, where he used to manifest himself, was not strange, but that I should have such a favour *here*, that God should not only look upon me, but admit me to look upon Him, and visibly to appear to me after I had run away from Him and from my godly master; this was more than I could hope or expect."—*Poole*.

In the same way David comforts himself with the consideration of the Lord's omnipresence and omniscience, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit?" "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?" not implying thereby that he would do so if he could; far from it; for he goes on to say, that wherever he is, whether in Heaven or Hell, or in the utter-

most parts of the sea, "even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (Ps. cxxxix.) And thus may the meanest and weakest of God's saints encourage himself with the assurance that, even though he has "gone on frowardly in the way of his heart," the Lord "sees his ways and will heal him; will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him" (Is. lvii. 17, 18), according to the riches of his grace in Jesus Christ.

2 SAMUEL XIV. 14.

“As water spilt on the ground.”

COMMONLY quoted in the sense of something *wasted*, and thus sometimes applied to heartless prayers and listlessly heard sermons.

The widow of Tekoah, however, used the expression to illustrate a thing that *could not be recalled*, viz., man's life: “We must needs die, and (are) as water spilt upon the ground that *cannot be gathered up again.*”

2 KINGS VIII. 13.

“ And Hazael said, But what, (is) thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shown me that thou shalt be king over Syria.”

COMMONLY quoted to exemplify the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart. Hazael being supposed to revolt from the cruel actions which the prophet declared he would commit; but the word “great,” is almost always omitted in the quotation, and yet in this word lies the whole force of his exclamation of surprise.

I think we may gather from the context that Hazael entertained ambitious designs, and having inquired of the prophet concerning the king’s recovery, was ashamed under the searching looks of the holy man, and when he plainly told him

of the exploits he was to perform, he exclaimed, with probably feigned humility, "What such a dog (dead, *Sept.*) as thy servant do such great things:" (so Dr. Geddes translates the passage :) expressing wonder that *so mean* a person as himself should wield so mighty a power.

"An act of power not to be done but by a crowned head, it must be some mighty potentate that can think thus to prevail against Israel, and therefore not I."—*Henry*.

The term "dog" is much more commonly used in Scripture to denote *meanness* than *wickedness*. (See 1 Sam. xvii. 43; xxiv. 14; 2 Sam. ix. 8; xvi. 9; Job xxx.)

That Hazael was ripe for every wickedness is evident, from the fact of his first concealing the principal point in the prophet's answer from the king, and then murdering him on the morrow. He seems, therefore, to afford a singularly inappropriate illustration of a novice in sin.

1 KINGS VIII. 38.

“Shalt know every man the plague of his own heart.”

COMMONLY quoted as if these words were applicable *exclusively* to that godly sorrow and conviction of sin which is the first work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man, as declared by our Lord in John xvi. 7, 8.

But are they thus limited? Compare this passage with its parallel in Chronicles, and it will be seen, I think, that God by the mouth of Solomon encourages every man to spread “his own *sore* and his own *grief*,” whatever it may be, before him in his holy temple,* even as Jesus invited all that are weary and heavy laden to come unto Him. (Matt. xi.) And as David typically received every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt,

* Dr. Geddes reads, “whatsoever the calamity, whatsoever the disease,” &c.

and every one that was *bitter of soul*. (Marg.) To know the plague of our own heart is not then, I conceive, the attainment, through grace, of a few; but the universal experience of all, "for what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man that is in him?" (1 Cor. ii. 11; Prov. xiv. 10.)

It is a happy thing when sorrow of any kind brings us to a throne of grace; but most blessed is it when a man's chief "sore and grief" is the burden of indwelling sin, and his most earnest petitions those to be delivered from its guilt and power.

PSALM XXX. 5—8.

“For his anger (endureth but) a moment; in his favour (is) life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.”

THE literal translation of the former part of this passage is, “we are a moment under his wrath, but a life are we in his favour.”

The sixth and seventh verses are commonly quoted to illustrate the danger of self-confidence, followed, as it is said to be, in David’s case, by the hiding of God’s face. “He had long enjoyed prosperity,” says Henry, “and then he grew secure, and over confident of the continuance of it,” &c. According to which interpretation of the Psalm, “joy in the morning” is followed by “weeping at night!”

But is not this an entire misunderstanding of the Psalmist's experience? and is it not imputing a sin to him of which he was in no degree guilty? For observe, the whole tenour of the Psalm is praise for deliverance, not confession of sin. "Joy came in the morning, *and* in his prosperity he said," &c. The full stop seems to have been put improperly between the two verses, but there should be one after "strong." "I shall never be moved, Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled," &c. In the latter part of the seventh verse he is only recapitulating his wretched state spoken of in the beginning of the Psalm, in order to stir up his soul afresh to thankfulness and praise.

No doubt a greater than David speaks here of his sorrows, especially of that awful crisis when God hid his face from him, and he was troubled; all which *preceded* the joy in the morning of the resurrection, when he could *without any boasting* talk of his prosperity and of "the strength settled

for his mountain." (Marg.) From this state there never has been and never will be any such *relapse* as is supposed to be spoken of in this Psalm. Bishop Horsley considers the above view of this Psalm as the only way in which it can be made applicable to the Messiah, and he mentions that the Chaldaic paraphrase of the sixth verse runs thus:—"And I said, When I am seated in security I shall not be moved to all eternity."

PSALM XLV. 13.

*“The King’s daughter is all glorious within :
her clothing is of wrought gold.”*

COMMONLY quoted to shew that the glory of the King’s daughter, the Queen—the Bride—denoting primarily Jerusalem; and secondarily the whole Church—is not so much external as *internal*. Yet her clothing was of “wrought gold!” Is it not then more consistent with this context to understand “within,” not as within *herself*, but within her pavilion, whence she is to be brought forth? (Like Queen Esther, when about to enter into the presence of King Ahasuerus in *her royal apparel*.) (Est. v. 1.) “With gladness and rejoicing to enter into the King’s palace.”

PSALM CXIX. 25.

“ My soul cleaveth unto the dust.”

COMMONLY quoted by way of confession in the sense of the apostle's complaint, “ I am *carnal*, sold under sin.” (Rom. vii. 14.)

But is it not rather an expression of deep sorrow than confession of sin? For thus is the word “ dust ” used in other passages. Such as “ Thou hast brought me into the *dust* of death.” (Ps. xxii. 15.) And “ Wilt thou bring me into the dust again?” (Job x. 9.) And here the expression, “ My soul cleaveth unto the dust,” seems to be paraphrased in the twenty-eighth verse by “ My soul melteth for heaviness,” and the prayer, “ quicken thou me,” probably has the same force as Ps. lxx. 20—“ Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt *quicken* me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.”

I do not think the word “ dust ” is found

in any other Scripture in the sense of *carnal* or *sinful*, but only as denoting *frailty* and *misery*.

We often hear people speak of "*sinful* dust and ashes," but the expression is not in Scripture.

Manton says, "The speech is metaphorical, expressing the depths of his *misery*, or the greatness of his *sorrow and humiliation*. The same allusion is, 'Our soul is bowed down to the dust, our belly cleaveth unto the earth.' (Ps. liv. 25.) Doctrine: That God's children may have such great *afflictions* brought upon them that their souls may even cleave to the dust."—*Manton*.

PSALM CXLII. 4.

“No man cared for my soul.”

COMMONLY quoted as if the Psalmist were complaining that no man cared for his *spiritual interests*.

The whole Psalm contains the language of David and his great Antitype in *straits and afflictions*—persecuted by enemies and deserted by friends.* No man cared for his soul or life. His enemies sought to take it away, and his friends “all forsook him and fled,” and it might be truly said of them, especially of Peter, “No man would know him;” but the Lord was his refuge, who would “bring his soul out of prison,” or, as it is said in Ps. xvi., “would not leave his soul in hell,” &c.

And thus may all those comfort themselves who are called upon to taste this

* The Psalm is entitled by Bishop Horsley, “A prayer of the Messiah taken and deserted.”

bitter ingredient of our Lord's sufferings, viz., the defection of friends and kindred, when their sympathy and support are most needed. "He will never leave them nor forsake them." (Five negatives in Greek.) (Heb. xiii. 5.)

So said the apostle—"No man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." (2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.)

And the Psalmist says here, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord: and said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living."

PROVERBS XIV. 9.

“Fools make a mock of sin.”

COMMONLY quoted in the sense that the wicked think lightly of and make a joke of sin; as another proverb says: “It is sport to a fool to do mischief.”

But where then is the usual antithesis between this first and the last clause of the verse? “But among the righteous (there is) favour.” Another reading has been suggested, which, if the original will bear it, seems to get over the difficulty, and to supply a very good meaning to the whole passage, viz.: “Fools make a mock of a *trespass offering*,” as the same word is rendered, (Lev. v. 6,) “but with the righteous *it is in favour*.”

Gill seems to favour this reading. “Some, as Aben Ezra observes, render it a sin-offering, and interpret it of the sin-offerings under the law, as derided by wicked men;

but it may be better applied to the sacrifice of Christ." "Among the righteous favour," or *acceptance*, they are accepted with God upon account of the sin-offering of Christ, which "fools mock and despise."—*Gill*.

PROVERBS XVI. 1.

“The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.”

COMMONLY quoted to establish the truth that from the Lord proceed “all holy desires and good counsels,” and that man can say nothing to a good effect without his preventing and assisting grace.

The literal translation and that adopted by the Targum is, “From man is the counsel of the heart, and from the Lord is the answer of the tongue.” And the sense would then be (as adopted by Gill and Poole); a man may lay things together in his mind and prepare matter for a discourse, and yet, though men may be ever so well prepared to speak they are not able to do it unless the Lord gives them utterance. Sometimes, indeed, their tongues are overruled by God to say what they never intended, as in the notable cases of Balaam and Caiaphas.

PROVERBS XXIV. 16.

“For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.”

COMMONLY quoted as if the daily *sins* of the just were referred to, and as if to confirm this sense, the words “a day” are generally interpolated.

It appears, however, from the context that it refers to his *troubles*, from which he is promised deliverance—while the wicked, his enemies, are threatened with mischief—so Micah vii. 8, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.” “Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her,” &c.

ISAIAH XXXIII. 17.

*“Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty :
they shall behold the land that is very far
off.”* [“*Of far distances.*”—MARGIN.]

OFTEN quoted as if the prophet were speaking of heaven ; or, at least, of some happy spot far away from him to whom the words were addressed.

But this land, in which the king himself was to manifest himself in his beauty, was no other than that in the midst of which the people were shut up, even the land of Israel.

“You shall be permitted to look to the remotest part of the land of Judæa, as delivered from enemies, and as still under the happy sceptre of your king. *You shall not be confined by a siege*, and straitened within the narrow walls of Jerusalem. The empire of Hezekiah shall be extended over the wide dominions that appropriately

belong to him, and the nation shall be at peace; and you shall be permitted to range freely over the whole land, and even over the parts that are now occupied by the forces of the Assyrian.”—*Barnes*.

This paraphrase seems to come very near the meaning of the passage, making allowance for our commentator being opposed to the restoration of the Jews and the personal reign of the King of Zion: for Hezekiah never possessed the land promised to Abraham (Gen. xv. 18), which is yet in reserve for Him whose “dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.” (Zech. ix. 10.) “Whose right it is, saith the Lord God, and I will give it Him.” (Ezek. xxi. 27.)

ISAIAH XLV. 11.

“Ask of me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.”

COMMONLY quoted as an encouragement to prayer, and as an exhortation thus to “command the Almighty.”

Poole, after referring to this common interpretation, says, “But the words seem to be better rendered *interrogatively* as they are in the margin, and by some interpreters, ‘Will you ask of me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands will ye command me?’ Will you not allow me the liberty which yourselves take, of disposing of my own children and works as I see fit? Must I give you an account of these matters? Will you set bounds to me by your commands, &c.?’”—*Poole*.

Jehovah then begins his reply in verse

ISAIAH LXIII. 3.

“ I have trodden the wine-press alone.”

NOT unfrequently applied to the sufferings of our Divine Saviour, as Bishop Heber writes :—

“ Alone didst pass the dark and dismal shore,
Alone didst tread the wine-press, and alone,
All-glorious in thy gore,
Didst life and light restore
To us, who lay in darkness and undone.”

Bishop Heber.

And another hymn-writer :—

“ Alone the dreadful race He ran,
Alone the wine-press trod ;
He groans, He dies ;—behold the man !
He lives ;—behold the God !”

From Rev. H. V. Elliott's Collection.

Not only is such an application of the passage altogether at variance with the context, but it makes absolute nonsense, inasmuch as the *active* is thus confounded with the *passive*.

For did He *tread* the wine-press of his anger when He suffered? Was He not rather *trodden* in that of His Father's wrath?

To tread the wine-press is to *execute* vengeance, not to *suffer*, and it is plainly to this period, yet future, that the whole passage from which these words are extracted, refers; the day when Satan and all the wicked shall be bruised under his feet and the feet of his people. (Rom. xvi. 20.) "I will tread *them* in mine *anger* and trample *them* in my *fury*, and *their* blood shall be sprinkled, &c., for the *day of vengeance* is in my heart." (See Rev. xiv. 19; and xix. 11, 13.)

"Christ is described here, not as a priest sacrificing or shedding his own blood, but as a king conquering and shedding the blood of his and his Church's enemies; hence it is said, 'their blood,' not his own; besides, to show that it cannot fairly relate to his passion, Christ could *expect* no help in that, for he knew none could; but here He looked, and wondered that there was none."—*Poole*.

JEREMIAH VIII. 20.

*“ The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.”*

THESE words are sometimes put into the mouth of those who are ever intending to seek the salvation of their souls, but let season after season go by without getting any nearer to heaven ; and sinners are warned to “ seek the Lord while He may be found,” &c., lest their day of grace be ended, and they have to mourn at last over opportunities lost, and all hope of salvation past irretrievably and for ever.

But a very slight consideration of the context will show that this does not accord with the meaning of the words as used by the prophet. Judah had hoped that the alliance of the King of Egypt would protect them against Nebuchadnezzar ; but it was a vain hope, and so they were brought to say, as in Lam. iv. 17, “ As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help ! in our

watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us." Or in the words of the text, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." The season in which we hoped for relief is past. It is too late for the Egyptians now to move to our succour, and there is nothing before us but impending ruin. "The winter is no time for war,—the year is gone, and we are still frustrated in our expectations."—*Poole.*

The obvious instruction to be deduced from this appears to be that contained in that striking passage in chapter xvii., "Cursed be man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord;" and if the word "saved" (so strongly associated in the mind of Christians with the salvation of *the soul*), had not occurred in the passage the text would, probably, never have been applied to any other meaning. Now, however, the vain hope of salvation from Egypt is understood "spiritually," as it is termed, as if the help they had looked for and been

disappointed of, had been from the Lord. By "spiritually" is meant "figuratively;" but can the Egyptians be taken figuratively for the Lord? Nay, so far from it, the one is mentioned in *contrast* to the other; and it is *not*, therefore, a case where the one meaning can be called the primary, and the other, the secondary sense of the passage.

Would it not be much better to leave this text in its natural meaning, and to take another,—the parable of the barren fig-tree, for instance,—to enforce the important lesson of the danger of neglecting the means of grace, and delaying our repentance, lest, "being often reprov'd and hardening our neck, we be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy?" (Prov. xxix. 1.)

JEREMIAH X. 23.

*“I know the way of man is not in himself,
it is not in man that walketh to direct
his steps.”*

COMMONLY quoted to express the feelings of the believer who sincerely desires to do what is right, but is painfully conscious of his inability to carry into effect those things which he has purposed in the spirit, and thus he calls upon Him, “from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed,” “to establish the work of his hands,” &c., &c.

An examination, however, of the context and of the circumstances under which the prophet spoke the words, will show, I think, that he did not use them in this sense, and that the “man” spoken of was *not himself*, nor the people of Jerusalem, but the *ungodly Nebuchadnezzar*, whose steps were being ordered by God without his at all

so meaning it. (Is. x. 7.) Scott says, "By thus addressing God, the prophet taught the people in what light to view their calamities, and *how to pray respecting them*. He speaketh this because that Nebuchadnezzar purposed to have made war against the Moabites and Ammonites, but hearing of Zedekiah's rebellion he turned his power against Jerusalem. In this enterprise he had been guided and prospered by God, who employed him to punish his rebellious people. The hand of the Lord must therefore be acknowledged and his justice submitted to in these afflictive dispensations."—*Scott*.

Compare with Ez. xxi. 19, 21, where we find, "the king of Babylon standing at the parting of the way at the head of the two ways to use divination," undetermined which he should first attack, Rabbath or Jerusalem, and the Lord so overruled it that his inquiries by three kinds of divination all concurred in determining him to march against Jerusalem rather than against Rabbath. Gill also mentions that the passage

was thus understood by Jewish commentators. It is true that both Scott and Gill accommodate the words to the sense usually given to them, but I cannot but think that when there is no lack of passages in Scripture teaching that the wisdom, and righteousness, and strength, and salvation of the righteous, are of the Lord, it is better to appropriate this passage (according to its literal and primary meaning) to comforting the people of God when suffering at the hand of man, by the consideration that such chastisements are of the Lord's appointment, that they will be no heavier than is needful for them, and will cease when they have done their work. Thus the "Lord corrects his people, but with judgment, not in his anger, lest He bring them to nothing," but "pours out his fury upon the Heathen" (v. 24), who were at ease, and when He was but a little displeased, helped forward the affliction. (Zech. i. 15.) Thus Joseph said in the retrospect of his afflictions, "As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to

bring to pass, as it is this day." (Gen. 1. 20.) And David in regard to Shimei's curses, "So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto Him, Curse David. Who then shall say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" And Jeremiah himself, in Lam. iii. 37, 38, "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good? Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"

Dr. Durell, quoted by Blayney, reads the passage thus: "I know with respect to *Jehovah* that His way is not like that of a mortal; that He doth not walk nor direct his steps like a man." This sense is also adopted by the Syriac version.

Whether "the way" and "the steps" be those of *Jehovah* himself, or of Nebuchadnezzar under his direction, is, in effect, the same thing, for so we read in 2 Sam. xxiv., that "the Lord moved David;" and in 1 Chron. xxi. 1, that Satan "provoked him to number Israel."

HOSEA IV. 17.

“Ephraim is joined to idols : let him alone.”

COMMONLY quoted to show that man may sin till God will give him up or “let him alone,” and, seeing that God does not say, *I will let him alone*, he is supposed to utter an apostrophe thus : “Conscience, let him alone ; ministers, let him alone ; providence, let him alone ; let nothing awaken him till the flames of hell do it.”—*Henry*.

But an examination of the context will, I think, shew that the Lord is addressing *Judah*, and exhorting her, for her own sake, Do thou, *Judah*, let him alone. “Though Israel play the harlot, (yet) let not Judah offend.”

Our Lord uses the very same words (according to our version) in reference to the Scribes and Pharisees : “Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind,” &c. (Matt. xv. 14; so also Prov. iv. 14.)

“Enter not in the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.” And in 2 Cor. vi. 17: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.”

Poole paraphrases the passage thus:—
“He is indeed obstinately bent on his old courses, and as such throw him up: he will not return; let him wander; but let it be *alone*, O Judah; be not his companion, his friend, go not with him.”

That God did not reprobate Ephraim on account of his idolatry is plain, from the gracious declaration in the last verse but one of the prophecy, where he foretels that “Ephraim (shall say), What have I to do any more with idols?”

AMOS IV. 12.

“ Prepare to meet thy God.”

SOMETIMES quoted as if addressed to the dying, without reference to their state, and as if it were applicable to a dying saint as well as to a dying rebel; but it clearly is intended for the latter only, and that in the midst as well as the end of his course; for it is the Almighty's challenge to the incorrigible.

“ Because none of my former methods have succeeded, as in reason might have been expected, in some more terrible manner will I proceed against thee, and therefore my best advice to you is to consider it well; if you think well of it, possibly you may see and prevent the threatened evil; if you refuse to return, know that you must perish, for you can never make good your cause against God, and yet you must meet Him, for He will, ere He hath done with you, end the controversy. Thy

God, *i. e.*, who was once thy God, and whom thou still ownest for thy God, and who would be thine if thou repent.”—
Poole.

MICAHA II. 10.

“ Arise ye, and depart ; for this is not your rest : because it is polluted,”

THUS far the text is quoted, the *colon* after “rest” being disregarded, and the comma after “*polluted*” being treated as a full stop. And then, the passage is applied as a warning to men “not to set their affection on things on earth,” &c., and to remember that “here have we no continuing city, and to seek one to come.”

A comparison, however, of the whole text with its context, and with parallel passages, will show that the command to depart is not given by way of exhortation, but as a denunciation of punishment for the sins of those who have polluted the land, “because it is polluted, it shall destroy you ;” as is again said in chap. iv. 10: “Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now

thou shalt go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon." They were to be *expelled* from their pleasant land, even as Satan was expelled from heaven, and Adam from Paradise, and the Canaanites from Canaan, (Lev. xviii. 25—28,) which they severally "polluted" or "defiled" by their wickedness. Similar language is used by Isaiah xxiii. 12, when he tells the "daughter of Zidon" to "arise, and pass over to Chittim;" and by Jeremiah, in Lam. iv. 15: "Depart ye; (it is) unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there. The anger of the Lord hath divided them," &c. It seems a great misconception of Scripture analogy to take the *land of Canaan* as a figure of *this world*, which we are to forsake; and *Babylon* of that *better one*, which we are to seek.

HABAKKUK II. 2.

“Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.”

COMMONLY quoted in proof of the plainness of Scripture, and the words are often incorrectly repeated, “that he that runneth may read.”

The true meaning, however, seems to be that given by Adam Clarke:—“That he who attentively peruses it make speed to save his life from the irruption of the Chaldeans, by which so many shall be cut off. The prophet does not mean that the words are to be made so plain that a man running by may easily read them and catch their meaning. This interpretation has been frequently given; and it has been incautiously applied to the whole of the Bible: ‘God’s Book is so plain that he that runs may read;’ but it is very foolish. God never intends that his words shall be un-

derstood by the careless. He that reads, studies, meditates, and prays, shall understand every portion of this sacred book that relates immediately to his own salvation. But no *trifler* can understand it. If the contents of a *play-bill* were to be read, as many read the *Bible*, they would know just as much of the *one* as they do of the other." *—*Clarke*.

Davidson says the words may have been "a proverbial expression, denoting extreme *activity in the performance of duty*; or it may mean that he who reads may understand it so clearly as to be impressed with its importance, and feel impelled to make it known quickly, as a messenger commissioned to deliver important news."

* The writer does not mean to commit himself to these observations of the learned commentator without some modification.

LUKE XII. 26.

“ Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature ? ”

It must probably have struck most readers of this part of our Lord's discourse, as somewhat unaccountable that He should have thought it necessary to warn his hearers against such an inordinate desire to become great in stature ; and, moreover, have spoken of it as “ that thing which is *least.* ”

It seems more intelligible and agreeable to the context to render the word *ηλικιαν*, “ age,” as it is rendered in the margin of Luke ii. 52. See Parkhurst on the words *ηλικια* and *πηχυς*, where he shows that the latter word, which properly denotes that part of the arm that is above the elbow, is applied by Greek authors to *time*—just as the expression “ hand-breadth ” or “ span,” (Prayer-book,) is used in Psalm xxxix. 5.

Doddridge's paraphrase of the passages runs thus : " Be not distressed with anxious cares about your subsistence in life. . . . This immoderate carefulness is useless as well as unnecessary ; for which of you can, by all his anxiety, add to his age or vigour so much as one cubit, or even the smallest measure or moment beyond what God shall appoint ?"—*Doddridge*.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

*“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh
(is) weak.”*

ARE these words of our Lord to be taken as a merciful *excuse* for his sleeping disciples, because their *bodies* were weary, or as a *warning* to them to “watch and pray,” because of trials yet to come upon them, and which they would want *moral* courage to endure without special grace from on high? The latter sense is adopted by Whitby, and certainly appears most agreeable to the context and the circumstances of the case; “It is as if he should have said, You have all made large promises—yet let me tell you that when temptation actually assaults—the weakness of the flesh will certainly prevail over these resolutions, if you use not the greatest vigilance, and do not pray with fervency for Divine assistance.”—*Whitby*.

It would have been well for all, especially

for Peter, if they had attended to their Lord's admonition.

It is a common but great mistake to take "the flesh" in such passages as the natural *body*, instead of the fleshly *mind*; that "*φρονημα σαρκος*,"* which doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated." (Art. ix.) This is the error adopted by the Papists in their teaching in regard to "mortification of the flesh," which leads to all that "*punishing* of the *body*" (see marg.), which is indeed "not in any honour," but to (or, as some read it, "is not of any value against") "the satisfying of the flesh." (Col. ii. 23.)

* In the *strength* of this evil principle lies the *weakness* of the flesh to perform the good which is proposed, as much as to refrain from the evil which is hated. (Rom. vii.)

MARK XII. 42.

“ And there came a certain poor widow, and she cast in two mites.”

WE often hear of and read in subscription-lists of “ a widow’s mite,” or “ a poor man’s mite,” and no doubt many persons of very moderate circumstances contribute a large proportion of their small means to pious objects; but no one is authorized to dignify his or her gift by the name of “ a widow’s mite,” unless they do as she did, viz., “ cast in all that she had, *even all her living.*” Whether it is the duty of any person to do so, is a question that must be decided by each man’s conscience, but nothing short of such entire devotion of *all* the poor man or woman’s store to the cause of God, can truly be called “ his or her mite.”

It is to be feared that many a niggardly giver uses the specious name of a “ widow’s mite,” when, in fact, he is “ casting in of his abundance,” but wants

an excuse for the smallness of his contribution.*

* The opposite to this passage is equally misunderstood. (Mark xiv. 8.) "She hath done what she could," that is, *much*, because she *could* do *much*, not *little*—as most in their quotations imply. Mary had given 300 pence (about 10*l.*), a large sum when labour was a penny a-day.

LUKE XIII. 24.

“ Strive to enter in at the strait gate : for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

A CONTRAST is sometimes said to be drawn in this passage between *striving* and *seeking* to enter in, and hearers are warned lest they be of the number of those who only “ seek and are not able ;” whereas by removing the full stop at the end of the verse and carrying on the sense to the following verse, it will be seen that our Lord is exhorting the people to seek to enter in *at once*, declaring that they “ shall not be able when once the Master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door,” &c. Then will it be *too late* ! The same word is used as in the exhortation in Matt. vii. 7, to seek with the promise that “ *every one*” who does so “ findeth,” that is, if he seeks *now*. “ Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. vi. 2.)

“Be careful, O ye Jews, now to believe and obey my word, before the kingdom be taken from you, and the gate of the Gospel banquet be shut, so that you after knock in vain for entrance.”—*Whitby*.

LUKE XVII. 34.

“ One shall be taken, and the other left.”

THE “ one taken ” is very generally spoken of as the one dragged off by the Romans, while the one left is supposed to escape; but the word *παραληφθησεται*, is never, I believe, used in such a sense in the New Testament, but often in that of a *kind* reception, as in John xiv. 3, “ I will receive you unto myself.” *Αιρω* is the word used for carrying away a captive. From which it would appear that our Lord is referring not to the Roman captivity, but to his own coming.

ACTS XXVI. 28.

“ Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

MANY excellent sermons have been preached and a book written upon “the almost Christian,” *i. e.*, one that is “not far from the kingdom of God,” but not in it. A character very different from that of Agrippa, who never was persuaded to make the slightest profession of being a Christian, but lived and died a notoriously wicked man.

The difference between being very like a Christian, and yet falling short ; and being “almost persuaded” to leave off ungodliness and become a follower of Jesus, is manifest.

Alas ! how many similar instances does history, ancient and modern, afford of men of clear and candid minds, but of strong passions and stubborn wills, who, though convinced of the “truth and soberness” of the Christian’s

faith and practice, have not been able to make up their minds to forsake their worldly and sinful companions and pleasures, to take up their cross and to follow Christ. Perhaps there are few (in this country at least) even of the most daring and hardened sinners, who have not at some time of their lives had thoughts of becoming Christians. With what remorse will those who have resisted the light and the strivings of the Spirit, look back from another world, on these critical moments in their history!

ROMANS I. 18.

“Who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

THESE words are often applied to an inconsistent profession of the truth; whereas they are spoken of the *heathen*, who will not yield to (*κατεχοντων*, restraining) the truth as far as they might know it from the works of creation, even “the eternal power and Godhead” of the Creator.

“These natural notions concerning God and their neighbour they did not obey and follow, but wickedly suppressed them. They *imprisoned* the truth, they acknowledged, that they might sin more securely. The metaphor is taken from tyrants who oppress the innocent and imprison them.”—*Poole*.

1 CORINTHIANS II. 9.

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.”

COMMONLY quoted as if these expressions referred exclusively to *future reward*; but in the whole previous and subsequent context the apostle is speaking of that “preaching of the cross” which was “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness,” but was “wisdom among them that are perfect;” and after having quoted the above passage from Isaiah, he goes on to say, “but God *hath* revealed them to us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things; yea, the deep things of God;” and then draws the contrast between “the natural man, who receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,” and “the spiritual man, who judgeth (discerneth, margin) all things.”

Gill says, "the words are not to be understood of the glories and happiness of the future state, though they are indeed invisible, unheard of, and inconceivable; but of the doctrines of grace and mysteries of the Gospel, as the context and reason of their citation abundantly show."

Doddridge paraphrases the passage thus:—"But this is as it is written, (Is. lxiv. 4,) when the prophet, speaking of the blessings of Messiah's kingdom, says, 'Eye hath not seen,' &c., nor hath the generality of mankind, or even the people who enjoyed the benefit of the Jewish Scripture, any just conception of the nature of this sublime plan, and the method by which it was to be accomplished. But God hath revealed them to us Christians, and especially to us his apostles, by 'extraordinary inspiration of his Spirit.'"

Whitby also adopts the same view of the passage.

1 CORINTHIANS XII. 31.

*“ But covet earnestly the best gifts : and yet
I show unto you a more excellent way.”*

DODDRIDGE’S reading and paraphrase of this verse appear to me to accord better with the context, and to render the passage much more intelligible than the way in which it stands in our version.

The apostle had been speaking of the divers gifts in the Church, all wrought by “ one and the self-same Spirit, and of the different offices of the members of the body of Christ, to be fulfilled without envy or contempt the one of the other ;” and then goes on to say, according to Doddridge, “ These things are well worthy of consideration ; but instead of attending to them ye contend (*in the indicative*) earnestly about the best or most shining gifts, envying, and it may be detracting from, the superior endowments of others. Yet I show you a

way of the highest excellence, to which it will be your greatest wisdom carefully to attend.—It seems contradictory to suppose that after the apostle had been showing them that these gifts were not at their own option, and that they ought not to emulate the gifts of each other, nor to aspire to superiority; he should, in effect, unsay all again, and give them such contrary advice.”
—*Doddridge.*

The next chapter shows that “charity” or “love” is that “more excellent way” which is far superior to all gifts, all knowledge, and all sacrifices.

1 CORINTHIANS XIV. 15.

“I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also.”

COMMONLY quoted, especially in prayers, as if the latter clause signified praying heartily and sincerely; but the context shows that the apostle is contrasting the praying with one's own *spirit*, and praying so as to be *understood by others*.

Blomefield says, “*τω νοι* is equivalent to *εις το νοεισθαι* ;” or, as Davidson translates it, “with my meaning understood.” “His sense is, that, though on some occasions he might choose to make use of his extraordinary gift, yet he would also pray in a language in which he might be understood by the people, so that they might be able to join with him, and receive some fruit and advantage thereby; and that their souls might be refreshed as well as his.”—*Gill*.

These words, then, may be turned into a very suitable prayer by one who conducts the devotions of a church, but are devoid of meaning in the case of those "who occupy the room of the unlearned."

2 CORINTHIANS XII. 16.

“ Being crafty I caught you with guile.”

SOMETIMES quoted as if the apostle by his own example sanctioned the use of “crafty” means in order to attain the holy end of “catching men.” (Luke v. 10.)

Were this his true meaning it would indeed furnish an excellent plea for the Popish doctrine of “pious fraud.” Almost all commentators, however, agree in viewing this as one of those instances, which frequently occur in the writings of the apostle, when he puts words into the mouth of an adversary or objector in order to reply to the charge. So far from boasting of his “guile,” he repudiates the imputation of having used any such means, directly or indirectly, in all his intercourse with them at Corinth. “Perhaps it will be insinuated that being subtle I took you by an artifice. . . . I defy the boldest of my enemies to allege what must recoil upon himself with so much infamy.”—*Doddridge.*

2 CORINTHIANS XIII. 5.

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves.”

COMMONLY quoted as an exhortation to self-examination, lest any should deceive themselves as to their real state before God.

But what was the matter the Apostle had in hand? Was it not the truth of his apostleship which was impugned by certain false apostles, who sought to undermine his influence at Corinth?

He boldly declares in chap. xii. 5, that he supposes himself “not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,” and proves his claim, first, by his multiplied labours, perils, and privations endured on behalf of the Church; secondly, by “the visions and revelations of the Lord,” which he had seen; thirdly, by “the signs of an apostle, wrought among them in signs and wonders;” and, fourthly, he adduces as a

proof of Christ speaking in him, *their own faith*; appealing to them in the words of the text, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;" you must, or ought to know your own selves, how that Christ is in you, "except that ye be reprobates," or spurious Christians, so ye shall know from this very fact that we are not reprobate or spurious apostles.

Αδοκιμος—adulterinus—non sincerus.—*Scapula*. See also *Adam Clarke, in loco*.

It would be well if those who attach so much value to "apostolical succession" would consider the force of this inspired test of apostleship.

GALATIANS I. 16.

“Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.”

To confer with flesh and blood, is a phrase almost always used as expressing a consulting *our own feelings and inclinations*, and very rarely in the sense of consulting with *our fellow-men*, and yet almost all commentators give the latter as the primary and the former as the secondary meaning included in the expression. Thus this is an instance of the truth of what I have said in my preface, that those who are in the habit of using a Scripture phrase in its accommodated, or what they would perhaps call its extended sense, entirely lose sight of, and never apply, it in its simple meaning.

But is the secondary sense even included here? The Apostle does indeed, in other places, speak of “the flesh which lusteth against the spirit,” but is he here at all re-

ferring to his own corrupt nature? Does not the scope of the whole passage show that he is simply proving this one point, viz., "that the Gospel which was preached by him was not after man, for neither had he received it of man, neither was he taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Vers. 11, 12.) And so he goes on to say that, "when it pleased God to reveal his Son in him, *immediately* he conferred not with flesh and blood, (*i.e.*, with any other person,) neither went to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before him, but went into Arabia," &c.

Adam Clarke, who, however questionable in his divinity, is undoubtedly an able critical commentator, says on this place, "I did not take counsel with MEN;" "*σαρξ και αίμα*," which is a literal translation of the Hebrew words for flesh and blood, which are a periphrasis for man, human being, or beings of any kind.* Many suppose that the Apostle means he did not dally, or take

* This does not contradict p. 46, where *σαρξ* stands alone, and is not joined with *άίμα*.

counsel with the erroneous suggestions and unrenewed propensities of his own heart or those of others, *but no such thing is intended by the text.* St. Paul was satisfied that his call was of God ; he had, therefore, no occasion to consult man."—*Clarke.*

1 THESSALONIANS V. 22.

“ *Abstain from all appearance of evil.*”

COMMONLY quoted in the sense of “provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” (2 Cor. viii. 21.)

But the word *ειδους* translated “appearance,” would be more properly rendered “shape” or “form,” as in Luke iii. 22, and ix. 29; John v. 37. And so, according to Whitby, the passage would run thus, “Abstain from all kinds or sorts of evil,” “and the very God of peace sanctify *wholly*, and (I pray God) your *whole* spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless,” &c. ; or as Leontinus says, “Fly not from this or that only, but from every sin.” Hammond states that this sense was adopted by several of the ancient fathers.

1 TIMOTHY IV. 12.

“ Let no man despise thy youth.”

COMMONLY quoted as an exhortation to the people to pay proper respect to young ministers; but it is rather addressed to Timothy, as one of the latter, for his own instruction. “ Conduct thyself in such a manner that no one shall *have any reason to despise* thy teaching on account of thy youth; but be an example in word, conversation,” &c.

So we pray for bishops, &c., in our Litany, “ that both by their preaching and living they may set forth God’s Word, and show it accordingly.”

1 TIMOTHY V. 8.

“ If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house (kindred, marg.) he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an Infidel.”

COMMONLY quoted as an injunction to make future provision for our children, which is so natural to man that so strong an exhortation to do this would scarcely be needed. It is evident from the context that it refers to *assisting destitute and deserving relatives* during our lifetime : a duty in which many professing Christians have been put to shame by the liberality of unbelievers.

HEBREWS XII. 17.

“He found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

THESE words are sometimes used as if Esau sought for repentance *for himself* and failed in attaining to it. Whereas it is plain from the facts of the case, as related in Genesis, that he thus carefully sought a way to change his *father's* mind” (vide margin); he was rejected, for “*μετανοιας τοπον ουκ ευρε.*”

“Isaac would not change his mind, nor recal the blessing which, as a prophet of God, he had conferred on Jacob.”—*Burkitt.*

2 PETER III. 16.

“They that are unlearned and unstable wrest the Scriptures unto their own destruction.”

How often is this passage quoted by the enemies to the diffusion of the Scriptures and of the right of private judgment to prove the danger of putting the Word of God into the hands of the common people! If this, however, had been designed by the Apostle, he would not have used the word *αμαθεις*, but *αγραμματοι*, applied to himself and John by the *priests*, (Acts iv. 13,) when they heard them proclaiming the great truth, that there was none other name under heaven but that of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whereby we must be saved. The unlearned and unstable (*αμαθεις και αστηρικτοι*) referred to by Peter, were in his days, and have been ever since, found amongst the *most learned* doctors and so-called divines, who have stumbled at and

perverted truths which have been understood and appreciated by "*illiterate*" men, whose minds have been enlightened and hearts opened to receive them by the Spirit of God.

REVELATION XXII. 17.

*“ And the Spirit and the bride say, Come,
and let him that heareth say, Come.”*

To whom is this addressed? It is often understood as addressed to “him that is athirst” (and who is invited to “come” in the *latter* clause of the verse); but this seems rather to be one of those sudden transitions or digressions that are not uncommon in Scripture. The primary welcome is addressed to “the bright and morning star,” whose glorious coming is the great subject of the whole book, especially of the latter chapters. Accordingly He responds to the cry of the Spirit and the bride, “Surely I come quickly;” to which the apostle adds, “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

“The Holy Spirit and the Church desire the second coming of Christ to judgment, and every one that heareth of and believeth

these things should also desire the same thing.”—*Poole*.

“Observe the affection which this bride expresses towards her bridegroom ; she says, Come ; she passionately and impatiently desires and vehemently longs for his coming ; and then see the invitation returned by Christ, ‘ And let him that is athirst, come,’ &c. We must first come to Christ by faith and repentance, before we can desire Christ’s coming to us by death and judgment.”—*Burkitt*.





